

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
----- 053472 /11
O R 180416Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1120
INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SEOUL 10014

EXDIS

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PFOR KS US
SUBJ: ATMOSPHERICS ARISING FROM CURRENT US/ROK DIFFERENCES

BEGIN SUMMARY: WHILE NOT YET REPORTED IN ROK PRESS, ROK BRIBERY ALLEGATIONS, REPORTS OF BLUE HOUSE BUGGING, KIM SANG KUN DEFECTION, AND AFFECT THESE ISSUES HAVING ON US/ROK RELATIONS, ARE PREOCCUPYING INFLUENTIAL POLITICAL THINKING HERE AND DOMINATING ALL DISCUSSIONS WE ARE HAVING WITH ROKS. UNIVERSALLY WORRIED BY ADVERSE TREND THEY PERCEIVE IN RELATIONS AND POTENTIAL COLLISION BETWEEN FUNDAMENTAL LOYALTIES TO PRESIDENT PAK AND U.S. RELATIONSHIP, EMBASSY'S REGULAR CONTACTS ARE GOING OUT OF THEIR WAY TO CONVEY ATTITUDES, CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS. WHILE WE HEAR NO VOICE DEFENDING PARK TONG-SUN OR KCIA ACTIVITIES IN U.S., MANY QUESTION U.S. HANDLING OF BOTH BUGGING AND KIM CASE AND DEFEND ROKG REACTION TO U.S. ACTIONS IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. MOST SIMPLY EXPRESS CONCERN AND DESIRE TO FIND WAYS TO MEND DIFFERENCES WITH U.S. SIGNIFICANTLY, HOWEVER, WE HAVE ALSO HEARD MORE ANTI-PAK SENTIMENT THAN WE HAVE HEARD FOR ALMOST TWO YEARS. END SUMMARY.

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1. PRESIDENT PAK REACTION OF SEVERE ANGER TO U.S. ACTIONS IS WELL KNOWN IN INFORMED ROK CIRCLES AND TO VARYING DEGREES IS DOMINATING THINKING AND STATEMENTS OF PRESIDENT'S CLOSE FOLLOWERS, BOTH IN AND OUT OF GOVERNMENT. CRITICAL ISSUE FOR PAK IS IMPLIED ATTACK ON HIMSELF AND HIS PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALLEGED SCANDALS IN U.S. PRO-PAK FOCUS HAS ALSO BEEN ON

"INVASION OF SOVEREIGNTY" REPRESENTED BY BUGGING ALLEGATION TOGETHER WITH U.S. REFUSAL TO DENY IT PUBLICLY, SUSPICION THAT KIM SANG KUN WAS ABDUCTED OR AT MINIMUM CAJOLED INTO DEFECTING BY FBI, AND SHARP QUESTIONING AS TO WHY U.S. PICKING ON LOYAL ALLY WHEN OTHER NATIONS EQUALLY OR MORE GUILTY OF BRIBERY AND LOBBYING IN WASHINGTON. THIS LINE OF THINKING WHICH GROWS OUT OF STRONG SENSE OF NATIONALISM, AND SUSPICION THAT BRIBERY CASE AND PRESS REPORTS BEING USED BY HIGH U.S. OFFICIALS TO FORCE OVERTHROW OF PAK REGIME, CONCLUDES THAT ROK WILL "GO-IT-ALONE" WITHOUT U.S. SUPPORT IF NECESSARY.

2. INTERPRETING STRENGTH OF THESE FEELINGS, SOME EMBASSY FRIENDS CLOSE TO GOVERNMENT WARN THAT THIS NOT JUST TYPICAL KOREAN BARGAINING TACTIC TO WIN CONCESSIONS FROM US AND THAT DESPITE ILLOGIC OF "GO-IT-ALONE" POLICY, PAK REGIME'S CURRENT POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STRENGTH WILL ENABLE PRESIDENT TO PERSUADE GREAT MAJORITY OF PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM, IF HE FEELS FORCED TO THIS POINT. ROKG "PROPAGANDISTS", SUCH AS PRIME MINISTER, ARE PUSHING "SELF-RELIANCE" THEME HARD IN PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENTS. LONG-TERM EMBASSY CONTACT AND PERCEPTIVE FRIEND OF U.S. YUCHONGHUE ASSEMBLYMAN SO IN-SUK, CAME TO EMBOFF HOUSE IN HIGHLY AGITATED STATE TO ASK BLUNTLY AND ANGRILY IF U.S. ATTEMPTING OVERTHROW PAK, THEN MADE POINT THAT REGARDLESS OF LOGIC, CURRENT ISSUE COULD INDEED FORCE PAK TO CHOOSE BETWEEN OWN SURVIVAL AND U.S. ALLEGIANCE; CHOICE, HE SAID, WOULD INEVITABLY BE FOR SURVIVAL. ANOTHER WELL INFORMED INTERPRETER OF ROKG ACTIONS PARK CHUNG SOO ASSERTS PRESIDENT IS QUITE CAPABLE ACTING ON EMOTIONAL BASIS; WILL GO IT ALONE IF HE FEELS SUFFICIENTLY PUT UPON; AND MOREOVER WILL BE ABLE TO PERSUADE AND/OR INTIMIDATE FELLOW COUNTRYMEN INTO CONCLUDING THAT HIS COURSE CONFIDENTIAL

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ONLY RIGHT ONE FOR KOREA TO TAKE. PARK CHUNG SOO SAYS THOSE IDENTIFIED AS PRO-AMERICAN CURRENTLY BEING EXCLUDED FROM PRESIDENT'S INNER CIRCLE OF ADVISORS. HE INDICATED EXTENT OF KOREAN AWARENESS OF AND CONCERN OVER SITUATION AND PRESIDENT'S MOOD BY NOTING THAT MOST INFLUENTIAL PRO-AMERICAN FIGURES ARE TREADING VERY CAREFULLY SO AS NOT TO SAY OR DO THINGS TO CRYSTALLIZE CONFRONTATION IN PAK'S MIND AND FORCE DISASTROUS CHOICE.

3. SIGNIFICANTLY, HOWEVER, EXPRESSIONS OF SUPPORT AND INTERPRETATIONS OF PAK VIEWS ARE NOT ALL WE ARE HEARING. ANTI-PAK SENTIMENT IS NOW BEING VOICED FOR FIRST TIME IN ALMOST TWO YEARS, NOT JUST BY OPPOSITION ELEMENTS BUT BY GOVERNMENT FIGURES. WISDOM OF PAK'S LEADERSHIP IS FOR FIRST TIME SERIOUSLY QUESTIONED. PAK IS CRITICIZED BOTH FOR CONTRIBUTING TO KOREAN ACTIVITIES IN U.S., ALTHOUGH VERY FEW HOLD HIM PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR EXCESSES, AND FOR HIS HANDLING OF PROBLEM ONCE EXPOSES APPEARED. TRANSPORTATION MINISTER'S DISAFFECTION WITH GOVERNMENT POLICY WHICH HAS BEEN REPORTED HAS BEEN ECHOED BY OTHER

GOVERNMENT FIGURES IN VARIOUS WAYS. WHILE PRESIDENTIAL FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISOR KIM KYONG WON STRONGLY DEFENDED ROK POSITION DURING RECENT CONVERSATION WITH JAPANESE POLCOUNS, HE PRIVATELY ADMITTED TO AMBASSADOR VIEW OF MANY IN GOVERNMENT CIRCLES THAT KIM SEONG JIN'S STATEMENT TO FOREIGN PRESS DECEMBER 8 WAS MISTAKE THAT EXACERBATED PROBLEMS. OTHERS, LIKE FOREIGN MINISTER, ARE FEARFUL OF SELF-RELIANCE POLICY AND DENY ITS PRACTICALITY. ROK MILITARY, WHICH HAS LARGE STAKE IN U.S. RELATIONSHIP, HAS FOR MOST PART BEEN KEEPING HEAD DOWN ON ISSUE BUT ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF COMMENTED TO CINCUNC THAT DESPITE UPS AND DOWNS IN ROK/US RELATIONS, IT VITAL TWO COUNTRIES STICK TOGETHER. MAJOR GENERAL SOHN CHANG NAE OF JCS STAFF, WHO IS WELL KNOWN TO MANY AMERICANS, HAS EXPRESSED DISMAY OVER ROK ACTIONS IN U.S. AND PRESENT TREND OF TOP LEVEL ROKG THINKING. BUSINESSMEN WE HAVE TALKED TO WHO SHARE WITH MILITARY GREATEST STAKE IN U.S. RELATIONSHIP, ARE FOR MOST PART UPSET BY AND CRITICAL OF PRESIDENT PAK'S "HAWKISH" LINE. WE SUSPECT PAK IS AWARE OF AT LEAST SOME OF THIS CRITICISM AND REACTING
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TYPICALLY BY HUNKERING DOWN.

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
----- 053509 /11

O R 180416Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1121
INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SEOUL 10014

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4. AS REPORTED PREVIOUSLY OPPOSITION ASSEMBLYMEN SUCH AS OH

SE EUNG AND OHM YOUNG DAHL, WITH OBVIOUS SYMPATHY AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF MANY GOVERNMENT ASSEMBLY MEMBERS, HAVE LED SHARP ATTACK ON GOVERNMENT, PRESSING PRINCIPALLY SO FAR FOR DISCLOSURE OF FACTS IN CASE. IN ACCORD NATIONAL ASSEMBLY RULES, HOWEVER, ASSEMBLYMEN HAVE AVOIDED OPEN CRITICISM OF PAK. VIEWS OF STRONG OPPOSITIONISTS (STUDENTS AND RELIGIOUS, INTELLECTUAL LEADERS, ETC) HAVE TAKEN INTERESTING TURN FROM INITIAL EXPECTATION THAT SCANDALS WOULD HELP THEM IN FIGHT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS TO GROWING CONCERN THAT STRAINS IN US/ROK RELATIONS COULD GET TO POINT WHERE ALL KOREANS ARE HURT. THIS GROUP NATURALLY BLAMES PAK FOR EXCESSES AND TROUBLE.

5. WHILE FEELINGS AND WORRY CLEARLY RUNNING HIGH AND ISSUE IS BEGINNING TO CREATE MORE DIVISIVENESS THAN ANY OTHER IN LAST FEW YEARS, SEOUL POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE STILL WELL SHORT OF "GOING CRITICAL". APART FROM STATEMENTS AFFIXING BLAME TO ONE SIDE OR OTHER, MANY HAVE UNDERLINED TO US IN RECENT DAYS THAT US/ROK RELATIONS HAVE SUCCESSFULLY PASSED THROUGH FREQUENT PAST STORMS. AND THOUGH PESSIMISTIC BY NATURE, KOREANS WE ARE TALKING TO EVINCE EXPECTATION THAT SOLUTION CAN BE FOUND IF THERE IS SOME GIVE ON BOTH SIDES. FROM WHAT WE CAN TELL, CONFIDENTIAL

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MILITARY LEADERSHIP WHICH DREADS SUCH PROSPECT STILL BELIEVES WE ARE LONG WAY FROM CRUNCH POINT WHERE IT WOULD HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN PAK AND U.S. COMPLICATING AND FRUSTRATING FACTOR FOR EVEN INFORMED KOREANS ON OTHER HAND IS LACK OF FACTS TO GO ON AND CONSEQUENT INABILITY TO FORM INTELLIGENT OPINION AND INSIGHT INTO MEANS OF SOLUTION.

6. LONGER TERM TENOR OF POLITICAL MOOD WILL OF COURSE DEPEND IN PART ON WHETHER AND WHAT SOLUTION TO IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF STRAINS IS FOUND. KOREANS SEEM INCREASINGLY AWARE, HOWEVER, THAT WHATEVER IS DONE TO DEAL WITH IMMEDIATE QUESTIONS OF BUGGING AND DEFECTOR KIM, U.S. JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND CONGRESS ARE BOUND TO DEAL WITH BRIBERY SCANDAL TO FURTHER DETRIMENT KOREAN IMAGE IN U.S. COUPLED WITH UNDERLYING UNEASE ABOUT U.S. ATTITUDES ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND CARTER ADMINISTRATION APPROACH TO KOREA, DAWNING REALIZATION THAT THERE WILL BE MORE BAD NEWS ABOUT PAST KOREAN ACTIVITIES IN U.S. HAS CREATED INCREASINGLY WIDESPREAD SENSE OF GLOOM AND DOUBT ABOUT THE FUTURE IN SEOUL. SNEIDER

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED CINCPAC.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: BRIBERY, SURVEILLANCE, FOREIGN RELATIONS, ALLEGATIONS, DEFECTION, LISTENING DEVICES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ellisoob
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976SEOUL10014
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760465-0891
From: SEOUL
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761230/aaaaazqq.tel
Line Count: 216
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ellisoob
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <27 MAY 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <27 SEP 2004 by ellisoob>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ATMOSPHERICS ARISING FROM CURRENT US/ROK DIFFERENCES BEGIN SUMMARY: WHILE NOT YET REPORTED IN ROK PRESS, ROK BRIBERY ALLEGATIONS, REPORTS OF BLUE HO USE BUG
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, KS, US, (SANG KUN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006